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# TRACING THE CONTOURS OF THE ENTREPRENEURIAL SELF

*Ich+AG* [from the English *Me Incorporated*] The notion of one's own person as a joint-stock company. The term indicates the decisive social transformation around the turn of the millennium. People regard themselves increasingly as entrepreneurs of their own lives, electing to assume responsibility for themselves rather than making others responsible for them. This development is confluent with the forced withdrawal of the state from its comprehensive security function. In addition, the transformation of the culture of work toward more self-reliance and entrepreneurship fosters the self-image as *Me-Incorporated*. A core component, as in a real joint-stock company, is the importance of working on one's own person: 'I must increase the market value of my *Me-shares*'!

The entrepreneurial self has no name and no address. Specimens can be found neither in offices nor in start-ups. Nor is it what empirical social research refers to as a 'modal personality', the statistical construct of the average subject combining the most common personality traits in a given group. Nor is it the newest social type, distilled from interviews or psycho-analytic case histories. It is neither a character mask from Marxian ideology critique, nor is it a script from the sociology of interactionism. The term 'entrepreneurial self' does not denote an empirically observable entity but rather a way of addressing individuals as people, of altering them and causing them to alter themselves in a particular way. It is a 'real fiction' in the sense employed by Hutter and Teubner (see Chapter 1): a highly effective *as if*, initiating and sustaining a process of continual modification and self-modification of subjects by mobilizing their desire to stay in touch and their fear of falling out of a social order held together by market mechanisms. The entrepreneurial self is a subject in the gerundive – not something that exists but something that ought to be brought into existence.

The figure of the entrepreneurial self is concentrated in both a normative model of the human and a multitude of contemporary technologies of self and social technologies of and society whose common aim is to organize life around the entrepreneurial model of behaviour. The figure is not only a set of rules of conduct; it also defines the forms of knowledge in which individuals recognize the truth about themselves, the control and regulation mechanisms they are subject to and the practices by which they condition themselves. In other words, the discourse of the entrepreneurial self does not so much tell people what they are; rather, it tells them what they have to become, and they can only become it because they have always already been addressed in terms of it.

### Entrepreneurial self or employee?

What distinguishes the entrepreneurial self from Max Weber's 'ideal type' is precisely this appellative, prescriptive, subject-constituting character. According to Weber's theory of social science, in order to find the ideal type in relation to a specific point of interrogation, especially characteristic elements need to be extracted from the material of a socio-historical context and raised to the level of a 'unified analytical construct'.<sup>2</sup> One such current ideal type is the 'labour force entrepreneur' or 'employee', whom the German sociologists G. Günter Voß and Hans J. Pongratz regard as 'a new basic form of the commodity of labour'. According to the authors, this type supplements if not replaces the formerly prevalent 'professionalised Fordian mass worker', embodying 'as leading type [the] most progressive form of subjective productive power'.<sup>3</sup> In contradistinction, the entrepreneurial self is not a heuristic category capable of guiding an analysis of social structure. Instead, it is the micropolitical rationale or logic, on which contemporary technologies of governing and self-governing converge. To reformulate the distinction already made above: it is not a tool for describing reality but for changing it.

Voß' and Pongratz' diagnoses coincide in many ways with the sets of demands made on the entrepreneurial self: first, workers are required to increase self-organization and self-monitoring; second, there is a growing coercion of workers to economize their own work capabilities and productivity; and third, everyday life in general is increasingly conducted on the model of enterprise.<sup>4</sup> However, the two sociologists of labour concentrate on changes to job orientation, exploring in this context the paradox phenomenon of 'hetero-organised self-organisation'.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, the present analysis of the entrepreneurial call is focused less on the 'subjectification of work'<sup>6</sup> than on the work of subjectification.

For the entrepreneur of her own labour force, the line blurs between wage earning and leisure, work life and private life, and the pressure to economize seeps into all aspects of daily life. Accordingly, Voß, Pongratz and other exponents of this approach broaden the labour-sociology perspective

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to take in the sociology of daily life. Once again, the interrogations run on parallel lines but there is an overt difference in focus: the approach employed by the authors mentioned investigates which strategies and arrangements people employ to cope with everyday life and which pressures they are subject to. The approach of the present study is to concentrate on the rationale and rationalizations, the programmes and technologies that pretend to come to people's aid by telling them how to live their lives.

Voß und Pongratz have since revised their thesis of change in the socially dominant types of labour force in the context of an empirical study. They no longer postulate that the old has been replaced by the new, but rather that both types co-exist. Summarizing their results, they write:

the loosening of normal work standards has two mutually countervailing effects. On the one hand, it is the dialectical extension of the type of the labour force entrepreneur and on the other hand it is the strategic deployment of elements of a proletarian model of labour especially well suited for 'simple' tasks.<sup>7</sup>

Accordingly, features characteristic of the labour force entrepreneur such as self-controlling, self-economizing and self-rationalizing are increasingly apparent in burgeoning job areas like information and communication technologies, as well as in education, consultancy and the so-called new economy, while the other segments of the job market are still dominated by the long-term employee type. The precarious labour force entrepreneur variant constitutes the growing army of small-scale freelancers eking out a living as 'Me Incorporated' with or without the aid of government supplements and with no realistic prospect of attaining the prosperity once associated with the figure of the entrepreneur.

The following elucidations are not an attempt to test the reach of the call to the entrepreneurial and to compare it with other calls. Instead, the focus is on elaborating on the rationale of this form of subjectification as well as on several of the key technologies that embody it. This form of subjectification affirms the diagnosis made by the theory of the labour force entrepreneur that, at the present time, imperatives to behave enterprisingly condition people's relations to themselves and to others. In contrast again to Voß and Pongratz, the present study is more focused on how theories and programmes mobilizing the entrepreneurial self are disseminated and how they gain credibility across political, social and academic divides.

## The triumph of the entrepreneur

Unquestioned credibility is a kind of historical a priori for thought and action. We realize that we can think and act differently when we see how the tacit presuppositions of our thought and action are woven into an historical context, when we return to the points of crisis at which previous

unquestioned assumptions became questionable and new ones developed. How do we account for the current convergence of a number of regimes of subjectification on the entrepreneurial self? Where is the historical point of entry for the 'triumph of the entrepreneur'?<sup>8</sup>

In 1984, the French writer and editor of the magazine *Esprit*, Paul Thibaud, published an article under this title. He submits the diagnosis that

[t]he ideological ground itself is in motion; it is the things themselves that instruct us, not just material events (irrepressible unemployment and its results), but mental drifts, unforeseen conclusions to which we are led, previously self-evident claims which suddenly can no longer be advocated: that the economy, for instance, is just a set of means at the service of society.

Thibaud attributed this shift of values to a crisis of the social-democratic era. According to his thesis, this era once obeyed the idea of disrobing the economy of its violent aspects and making it serve as the guarantor of a universal right to employment. The welfare state promised societal security at the cost of social discipline and standardization. Society appeared built on a set of rights defining the way individuals were educated, paid and engaged in leisure activities. Within this framework, it was up to people themselves which aims they pursued and which values they held. In 1968 at the latest, the utopian promise of a hygienic society had fallen out of favour and from the social-democratic project there remained little more than an individualism that exhausted itself in modest private hedonism within the latitude provided by the welfare state.

Thibaud understood the re-emergence of the entrepreneurial spirit as an immediate consequence of this process of erosion. After hedonistic individualism won the battle against puritan morals, it lost its revolutionary, romantic and exalted features and took to the art of the possible. This meant redirecting energies that 1968 had previously channelled into messianic political ideologies. The individual pursuit of happiness was transferred to consumption, which no longer promised the serial satisfaction of standardized needs in a Fordian mass culture, but lured instead with adventure and self-realization and rendered material inequality inaudible under a hymn to difference. The consumerist came together with the entrepreneurial imperative. Consumers were to accumulate 'pleasure capital', showing themselves as innovative, risk-loving and decisive, as though leading an enterprise to market victory. In the process, they could train behavioural dispositions that had succeeded in other areas of life:

From an entrepreneur of one's own pleasure, one can become an entrepreneur as such. This disproves, at least in part, Bell's thesis concerning the contradiction of capitalist culture: that it is puritanical and disciplinarian on the side of production, pleasure-seeking and seductive on the side of consumption. Between pleasure-seeking individualism and enterprising individualism, there



will henceforth be less contradiction than solidarity; and the passage from one attitude to the other is smooth. So this individualism, denounced as impracticable, ends up by finding in itself a kind of salvation, instilling civic prudence and a spirit of initiative.<sup>9</sup>

There was no longer an irresolvable contradiction between self-realization and economic success. Now the two were complementary.

According to Thibaud, this transformation corresponded to altered modes of production that in their own way also contributed to a renaissance of the entrepreneurial spirit. The myth of the self-made man celebrated its resurrection:

As needs and life-styles are differentiated, production becomes more diversified and mobile. The sense of commerce, of sale, of conception – especially the anticipation of new needs – the fact of being attuned to a nascent social mood become opportunities as much as technology and organization ... [E]very day we are told the story of someone who, 'starting with nothing,' had the genius to discover in his contemporaries the 'latent need' of an object or a service which, in our routineness, we would not have imagined.<sup>10</sup>

Thibaud emphasized that entrepreneurial culture did not mean the end of state intervention. He accurately depicted the transition from the welfare state to the activating state before it had occurred in fact: 'The new relations between economy and society will not be defined – as certain demagogues claim – by returning to wildcat capitalism, but rather by developing policies that integrate society into economy, policies of mobilization, integration, negotiation, which increasingly involve non-management groups in the functioning of the economy.'<sup>11</sup> The integration of society into economy that Thibaud describes involves an inversion of means and ends. The economy is no longer an instrument in the service of society and its political institutions. From now on, society and its institutions will be made to obey the imperatives of the economy. Thibaud concludes by outlining some of the effects of this transformation. The social-democratic era had tried to solve the problems arising from the rule of the economy by means of legal measures and social insurance. This problem now returns as a moral one: the problem of the superfluous masses, 'those who are marginalized, i.e., all kinds of persons who are declared useless, whom the hard-pressed welfare state leaves in the dirt and for whom other policies must be conceived'.<sup>12</sup>

The most remarkable thing about Thibaud's essay is its early recognition of the advent of the entrepreneur before the figure had fully come into view. The rise to power of Margaret Thatcher in Great Britain in 1979 and Ronald Reagan in the USA in 1981 had marked the break with post-war Keynesian economics. The general Keynesian consensus is what Thibaud refers to as the social-democratic era. A tenet of Thatcherism and Reagonomics was that individual citizens should become the entrepreneurs of their own lives.

The postulate of individual responsibility was hoisted to the top of the political agenda and underwrote the dismantling of social welfare safety systems.<sup>13</sup> Conservative lobbies in the UK and the USA had been calling for a radical free market turn since the 1970s. Their demand was not for the state to withdraw altogether but rather for it to establish a general 'enterprise culture', an active programme leaving no area of life untouched. A document from the British Centre for Policy Studies states that '[e]nterprise culture is defined as the full set of conditions that promote high and rising levels of achievement in a country's economic activity, politics and government, arts and sciences, and also the distinctively private lives of the inhabitants'.<sup>14</sup>

US president Reagan blew the same trumpet, declaring in a 1985 article a new 'entrepreneurial age' and calling on his fellow countrymen and women to reinvent the future, as had their ancestors between the Civil War and the Great Depression. Appealing to putatively typical national strengths – 'To be enterprising is not uniquely American, but entrepreneurship seems to be found more in the nature of our people than just about anywhere else' – Reagan promised his government would do everything in the way of tax cuts and thinning state bureaucracy to get the enterprising spirit off the launch pad.<sup>15</sup> As comic as the self-satisfied bathos of such expressions may appear, such appeals by government to the entrepreneurial spirit already have the same effect of stimulation as the economic measures they are meant to legitimize. If such rhetoric is considered necessary, it is because the free market and its protagonists – the entrepreneurs of their own selves – do not move under their own steam alone but rather by the force of permanent mobilization.

## Sociological analyses

In Germany, where the social-democratic project was abandoned later and less abruptly, the topos of the 'entrepreneur of her own labour' emerged for the first time, as far as can be ascertained on the basis of the present evidence, in 1984.<sup>16</sup> One of the circumstances of its demise was an analysis of the subjective strategies for coping with mass unemployment. Wolfgang Bonß, Heiner Keupp and Elmar Koenen identified the following reactions to unemployment: in addition to a 'mimetic, defensive reaction triggered by fear' and a 'tactical realism of the labour market', the basic experience of which was a 'sudden disappointment at the fact that securing employment could not be guaranteed by professional skill, practical understanding, intelligence and the mobilisation of all the economic and social resources belonging to the average man', they added to this a further reaction:

the hope of exploiting the chaotic situation in the labour market by mobilizing capacities for action, turning the seller of his own labour into the 'entrepreneur of his own labour.' This fiction, heavy with practical consequence, consists in



regarding oneself as the focal point of the logic of the labour market. That means making oneself virtually into the active subject of a rationality that uses the labour market to its own end. This 'entrepreneur' possesses nothing beyond his own labour force, yet he can offer a series of (partly artificial) differentiable skills, yet he can offer a series of skills that can be differentiated (sometimes artificially), mainly by resorting to basic and auxiliary abilities, for example possessing a driver's licence, work experience, social skills like 'confidence', 'leadership qualities', previous knowledge, sales training, administration experience, knowledge of foreign languages, stenographic or typing skills, skills in text or data processing.<sup>17</sup>

Imagining oneself as an entrepreneur turns the sense of powerlessness over real or threatened unemployment into an active posture and produces the rugged individual making it on her own in the wilderness of the labour market.

Bonß, Keupp and Koenen's remarks turn out to be especially farsighted given the fictional and yet seriously consequential character of this self-mobilizing, in which simulation and stimulation blend indistinguishably. The act of imagining oneself as an efficient agent instead of a defenceless plaything of market forces morphs indiscernibly into actually comporting oneself coherently and assertively as a market subject. This fiction undoubtedly occasions real effects. But it is another story to what degree people assume this fiction, how hard it is to sustain it and which opposing experiences they must overlook in order to keep up appearances.

In German social science, discussion of the general spread of entrepreneur-type behaviour has mostly been from the point of view of the sociology of labour, especially the sociology of industry.<sup>18</sup> The discussion came to a controversial head<sup>19</sup> with the critical employee theory of Voß and Pongratz, while the report of the *Zukunftskommission Bayern-Sachsen*, quoted in the introduction and co-authored by prominent sociologist Ulrich Beck, recommended the entrepreneurial self to political decision makers as a model for the future.

Similar to Voß and Pongratz, the Milan-based sociologist Sergio Bologna, an activist in the radical left-wing *potere operaio* in the 1970s, defines what he calls the 'new autonomy', the entrepreneurial form of work and life in contradistinction to the type of the Fordist mass worker. Whereas the latter was integrated in a hierarchical factory regime that regulated internal and external cooperation, autonomous workers have to organize their business relations themselves, meaning part of their work is taken up with communication. For such freelancers, the usual separation between workplace and private life is dissolved. Living space and workplace, free time and work time merge indiscernibly, overstepping by a broad margin the Fordist-era 40-hour work week. While employees leave the market as soon as they enter the factory, freelancers are at the market all the time. The gain in self-determination is paid for by a loss of economic security:

They can go for long periods without earning anything, living off savings to cope with the 'vacant times.' The notion of risk is inscribed upon the mentality of independent work, which is why its performance always has an aspect of advertising, by which means the independent worker tries to secure either the prolongation of the business relationship to the employer or initiate new relationships ... The fear of 'vacancy' prevents the independent worker from enjoying the fruits of his labour.<sup>20</sup>

Bologna points out that in the 1970s and 1980s self-employment was often a free choice made to evade the disciplinary pressure of the factory, rather than being imposed by economic necessity. In hindsight, despite their anti-capitalist thrust, the diverse forms of counter-culture after 1968 became a laboratory for entrepreneurial behaviour. For the new self-employed, the harmonizing of life and work, once proclaimed by the alternative movement, gets translated into an extension of work into all areas of life. For the genealogy of the entrepreneurial self, it is important to be aware of these counter-cultural roots of the new autonomy. This awareness guards against the fallacious view that the entrepreneurial demand is a form of repression. This view fundamentally overlooks the especially perfidious way the new regime of capital accumulation beats subjectivity into being. The type of the entrepreneurial self, of whose emergence Bologna could not be directly aware, could only rise to dominance by responding to a broad wish for autonomy, self-realization and non-alienated work. Without the utopian energies and the struggles of the new social movements, without their experiments with non-hierarchical organization, without the widespread refusal to be pressed into the Fordist mould, the role model of the entrepreneurial self would never have attained such attractive force.

Several British sociologists, discussing the upheavals of the Thatcher era under the title 'enterprise culture', have taken up Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality, providing an outline of the entrepreneurial self with the aid of his analyses of neoliberalism. The first step in this direction was taken by Colin Gordon<sup>21</sup> in his introduction to his reader, *The Foucault Effect* from 1991. Gordon offers an explanation of some fragmentary remarks of Foucault's on the construction of the subject within *human capital theory*,<sup>22</sup> applying them to contemporary issues around the general acceptance of mass unemployment and the rationale of benefit programmes. He writes:

The idea of one's life as the enterprise of oneself implies that there is a sense in which one remains always continuously employed in (at least) that one enterprise, and that it is a part of the continuous business of living to make adequate provision for the preservation, reproduction and reconstruction of one's own human capital. This is the 'care of the self' which government commends as the corrective to collective greed ... What some cultural critics diagnose as the triumph of auto-consuming narcissism can perhaps be more adequately understood as a part of the managerialization of personal identity and personal relations which accompanies the capitalization of the meaning of life.<sup>23</sup>



Gordon also concludes that the entrepreneurial self as a form of subjectification is a recurrence of *homo economicus* in inverted form. This reanimation presupposes human practice as fundamentally dictated by free choice for the purpose of maximizing utility. Whereas classical liberal thinkers like Smith, Hume and Ferguson were convinced that humans would follow their nature and act as rational economic subjects if political factors did not hinder them, the entrepreneurial self must instead be permanently recreated and activated by the state. This type of subjectification is not the freeing up of latent forces but rather a permanent effort of pushing and forming; not laissez-faire but behaviour modification, in all areas of life.<sup>24</sup> Governmentality studies focus less on changes in the domain of work than on the spread of entrepreneurial demands and self-interpretations in other spheres of life. Governmentality is especially concerned with the political strategies and psychological techniques deployed for governing individuals and causing them to govern themselves. *Enterprise* is not understood here as a specific type of organization but rather as a type of activity that can apply to firms, public institutions and private organizations as well as to their members, and finally to all and any individuals and all situations in life. Summarizing the rationale behind the prevalent programmes and popular cultural offers, Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose write that

[i]ndividuals had to be governed in light of the fact that they each sought to conduct their lives as a kind of enterprise of the self, striving to improve the 'quality of life' for themselves and their families through the choices that they took from the marketplace of life.<sup>25</sup>

The objection was voiced that enterprise culture had not taken hold in everyone's heads; that many continued to adhere to values like equality and solidarity rather than join in the song of praise to excellence and competition. Paul du Gay and Graeme Salaman met this objection by pointing to the deep roots of enterprise discourse in everyday life:

[E]ven if people do not take enterprise seriously, even if they keep a certain cynical distance from its claims, they are still reproducing it through their involvement in the everyday practices within which enterprise is inscribed. Thus enterprise should not be viewed as a 'pure' discourse as that term is often (mis)understood – i.e. as a combination of speech and writing – but always and only as a dimension of material practices, with material conditions of emergence and effectiveness.<sup>26</sup>

In addition, Nikolas Rose has established that in the call to the entrepreneurial self economic success and self-realization are not contradictory but rather interdependent and mutually reinforcing. They both follow the imperative of infinite growth: people ought not only to maximize their self-control, self-esteem, self-awareness and health but also their work

performance and their wealth. They will be better equipped to do this in proportion as they more actively assume responsibility for their own lives. If they are unable to cope with the strain of it all, they should seek professional help. The enterprising ethos and the values of therapy, especially in humanistic psychology, seem only at first glance opposed to one another. They converge in the regime of the self where it drives people to 'work on themselves' and take their lives in hand. The regime provides the self with a series of tools for dealing with a range of challenges, for seizing control of its own activities, setting targets, making plans to fulfil its needs, relying throughout on its own forces.<sup>27</sup> In short, enterprising selves are not manufactured with the strategy *discipline and punish* but rather by activating their powers of self-motivation.

## Intrapreneuring

In their concise theoretical treatment, Bonß, Keupp and Koenen emphasized the role of auto-fiction. The exponents of governmentality studies, on the other hand, focused on the political rationale, the technologies of self and the significance of psychological advice and expertise. The effects of self-shaping, they claim, correspond to a number of normative interpretations and institutional practices that address individuals as entrepreneurs of their own selves, thereby recommending that they orient themselves on this model. The proliferation of the entrepreneurial discourse was due less to publications and sociological analyses and still less to government statements and other political utterances. It came instead from a text genre that dominated the book market in the early 1980s: management literature. Books like Tom Peters' and Robert H. Waterman's (1982) *In Search of Excellence*, which has in the meantime sold more than five million copies and become the bestselling management book of all time, and Gifford Pinchot's (1985) *Intrapreneuring*, together with a plethora of other titles,<sup>28</sup> praised entrepreneurial virtues and supplied details of how the entrepreneurial spirit could be made to emanate down to employees, showering its benevolent effects on them from within.

Peters and Waterman, for example, identify as a distinguishing feature of leading American companies a 'simulated enterprise factor'. For the purpose of raising innovative potential, the authors recommend creating a 'limited autonomy position', which they define as 'a position that has substantial entrepreneurial champion-like qualities, but is actually quite constrained and exists in a much broader setting than one might expect'.<sup>29</sup> The loosening of company hierarchies, the establishment of free spaces and incentives and, above all, internal competition can create an environment in which 'creative fanatics' flourish, those enthusiastic and at the same time practical 'champions' whose innovations are so necessary to competing on the market:



'All the activity and apparent confusion we were observing revolves around fired-up "champions" and around making sure that the potential innovator, or champion, comes forward, grows, and flourishes – even to the extent of indulging a little madness'.<sup>30</sup> The emphasis, however, is on the *little* in 'a little madness': 'Since business is a "get-things-done" institution, creativity without action-oriented follow-through is a barren form of behaviour. In a sense, it is irresponsible'.<sup>31</sup> Peters and Waterman make no secret of the fact that the enterprise virtues their 'champions' should aspire to are entirely in the service of company success. When the authors invoke the 'enterprise in the enterprise', they do not mean the normal employee but rather middle managers. Nor should even their self-determination be unlimited. The tether is lengthened, not cut: 'It involves socializing the managers to believe they are would-be champions, yet at the same time maintaining very substantial control where it counts.'<sup>32</sup> The 'simulated enterprise factor' is built on the paradox of externally controlled autonomy.

Simulations have a reality of their own. They feign something that does not exist in itself but by feigning it they bring it into reality. Employees are not entrepreneurs but getting them to act as though they are turns the model into a general norm, which will influence their behaviour. Gifford Pinchot's invention of the 'intrapreneur', the 'intracorporate entrepreneur', aims to harness the power of norms to change reality. The intracorporate entrepreneur is distinguished by a readiness to take risks and the drive to innovate – attributes that inject energy into enterprises instead of paralysing them as do bureaucratic 'analysis and control systems'. Enterprises can here make use of the fact, Pinchot continues, that entrepreneurial ambition is not being driven mainly by the profit motive. 'Intrapreneurs' are rather 'primarily motivated to satisfy a personal need for achievement'.<sup>33</sup> Pinchot explains this motivation with a deep lunge into popular psychology. Since the book is primarily addressing a US audience, it frames entrepreneurial spirit as a specifically American virtue:

Our childhood fantasies still have more to do with taming the frontier and breaking free from tyranny than with advancing steadily toward the heights of vast organizations. Unlike the Japanese or most European nations, we lack a homogeneous culture and the manners for deference to authority. This makes it very difficult for most of us to accept the role of respected cog in a vast industrial machine. But we do have a spirit of self-reliance, adventure, and willingness to try new things. The result is that while we are poor at regimentation, we have a full measure of the entrepreneurial spirit.<sup>34</sup>

Pinchot, whose weapon of choice, like that of Peters and Waterman, is anecdotal evidence, is concerned to show not only that enterprising personalities make good subordinates, despite their rugged individualism, but also that companies absolutely need them in key positions. However, specific organizational measures need to be taken to retain intrapreneurs in

the company and increase their vigour. Pinchot stresses the importance of free election of tasks, not changing supervisors mid-project, the autonomy to make decisions within set frameworks, having sufficient resources and generous time frames, abandoning the 'home-run philosophy' and petty territorial struggles, risk affinity, failure intolerance, interdisciplinary teams and independence in the choice of internal and external partners. These

freedom factors are a way of managing, based on looking at a problem from the bottom up, not from the top down. They are derived from considering what the people who actually do the work need in order to get on with their jobs ... The presence or absence of these freedom factors determines how effective intrapreneurs can be in your corporate culture.<sup>35</sup>

Finally, the inventor of the term 'intrapreneur' equips his creation with a toolkit for building up the 'intraprise' from the idea to the business plan and from internal networking to team making and leading.

The bestsellers of Peters and Waterman and Pinchot mark the transition from the role model of the 'organization man'<sup>36</sup> to the entrepreneurial self. The organization man is not a model for ordinary people to follow but rather for employees in leading positions. The recommendations are directed at large companies who want to break up ossified structures by simulating entrepreneur functions (see Peters and Waterman) or by integrating entrepreneur types in the company (see Pinchot).

## How to set up Me Inc.

Advice literature from the 1990s finally pushed this rationale of the entrepreneurial self to its logical extreme, no longer propagating merely the entrepreneur within the enterprise but now presenting the individual as the enterprise: *You & Co.*<sup>37</sup> or the *Life Entrepreneur*.<sup>38</sup> The success and self-management tractates<sup>39</sup> that boomed in this decade were only partly about efficient methods for organizing time and work while coping with stress. They were, above all, modern wisdom teachings, instructing readers on how to lead the good life, providing an all-embracing model for subjectification with practical exercises for attaining *self-optimization*.

The guidebooks frame personality development and enterprise management as an organic, coherent whole. In order to fulfil the imperative of one such advice book, entitled *Self-Management: Become the Entrepreneur of Your Own Life*,<sup>40</sup> the same procedure must be followed as for setting up any new business. According to another success guidebook, the task for the entrepreneurial individual is to define herself as a product and then undertake thorough market research. This means grasping herself as an autonomous unit, not as part of a greater whole. She should see herself as surrounded by a market, even when she is the employee of a company.<sup>41</sup> Identifying







Are all of your personality elements fully engaged? Is every part at work in its proper place where it can attain maximal results? Are the parts working well together or is there competition and contention over jurisdiction? Is there reason to be concerned that some parts have handed in their 'inner letter of resignation'? Do all the parts even know each other or do you feel like the victim of a bundle of disparate fragments? Are all the parts enjoying the work, are they all healthy? Do they feel adequately respected and acknowledged?<sup>52</sup>

The questions already imply the answers: 'Aims are not achieved by inner trials of strength or self-overcoming, but rather by the dynamics of a cohesive, frictionless, syntonic personality system'.<sup>53</sup> To eliminate 'success roadblocks', such as those resulting from a conflict between 'career [and] happiness parts', the recommendation is to convene an internal round table sitting conference, electing a 'creative part' moderator, to seek possibilities for improving collaboration. In this model of personality, identity is corporate identity, the 'certainty of having a strong team consisting of a manifold of "true selves"'.<sup>54</sup>

Some doubt may persist here as to whether the antagonistic tendencies in the soul will really be reconciled by this method. On the other hand, a person torn between career and *joie de vivre* follows the entrepreneurial programme by being permanently in motion. When conflicting demands are being made of people, it is a reliable indicator for the call to the entrepreneurial self. The list of key skills the self-help literature both dictates to readers and promises to provide them with is predestined to impose impossible tasks on even the most ambitious self-optimizer. This excess of demand is part of the programme. It keeps the individual in a state of constant tension because she has to move in multiple directions at once. She must work untiringly for the firm while also taking care of her limited reserves. The programmes glide seamlessly between a grammar of severity and a grammar of care. The self-entrepreneur must decide intuitively or tactically which key to play in, but must finally be skilful in both.

This simultaneous mobilization of opposing forces is echoed in the way the self-help guides combine opposing strategies, propagating a rational and at the same time charismatic form of self-control. On the one hand, the entrepreneurial self should be a calculating administrator of its own life, on the other hand a source of motivational energy, untiringly striving for new achievements, and a firework spitting out innovative ideas. There is an obvious contradiction in this demand to optimize self-discipline and enthusiasm all at once. The disciplinary control and training are aided by checklists, contracts and feedback systems, techniques for releasing forces of passion, affirmation, auto-suggestion and self-outdoing. The one type of personal effort points the ship in the right direction and the other supplies the propulsion.

This regime of self-discipline is distinguished from earlier models in that the traditional disciplinary subject was always just beginning, whereas the

self-entrepreneur is never finished.<sup>55</sup> Both further education and the need for personal growth become continuous and permanent. The imperative to self-optimize implies the need to make comparisons, which in turns entails a general state of competition. A person can only maintain their position temporarily and in relation to their competitors, so no one can afford to rest on their laurels because they are in a game where the conditions of victory are continually shifting. Today's secret to success is tomorrow's recipe for disaster.

The inner sense of coherence among personality parts goes with a coherent outward presentation. For the self-entrepreneur, there is no shame in selling oneself. On the contrary, it is the only way to build self-esteem. The self-entrepreneur is her own permanent assessment centre, well aware that it is not enough to merely possess abilities; the crucial thing is to come across as the authentic expression of an individual personality. But self-marketing would miss its mark if it were mere role play. You must actually become what you want to come across as. For this reason, there is no point in trying to tear off the masks, execrating self-management as alienation. If you were to tear off the masks, the faces would go with them. The only form of self-alienation left would be the unhappy consciousness that distinguishes between outer appearance and inner being, objective commandment and subjective desire.

The tacit claim of the advice literature is that the omnipresence of the market leaves the individual with the choice between plunging head first into the competition and being left behind. People are autonomous economic entities, who should pursue happiness on their own initiative and at their own risk, and whose success therein will be in proportion as they relate to themselves in a market-like fashion. 'The Market's Will be Done', as Tom Peters profanely puts it.<sup>56</sup> The market is a kingdom of contingency, a fluid mix where loopholes and niches suddenly appear and as quickly disappear, more often than not filled by a competitor. Every attempt to arrest the flux is doomed to fail. To be successful, you must mimetically adapt to the environment, or, better still, outdo it in dynamism, seizing the day before someone else does.

The equalization of the individual and the enterprise that runs through management literature aims at producing synergy. When enterprises attempt to gain a competitive edge by elevating their employees to the status of self-enterprisers; when state agencies, educational institutions and NGOs improve efficiency by re-organizing like an enterprise, then the individual increases her chances of being made use of by acting like a labour force or like a relationship and leisure manager. Inversely, the 'humanistic' ideals of the autonomous life and inner balance that converge in the concept of the 'active personality with its harmoniously interacting parts'<sup>57</sup> promote the development of those qualities that companies demand of their employees, that employment agencies demand from their 'clients', universities from their students and volunteer associations from their members. Personal growth coincides with an accumulation of human capital; working on the self comes to coincide with job training.



The management and self-management literature displays unashamedly the rationale of the entrepreneurial self and the mechanisms by which it is generated. For this reason, we will continue to refer to this literature in the following chapters (and despite its lack of inner coherence and the difficulty of measuring its real effects on readers). Since the entrepreneurial self only exists in the gerundive, since it is a melange of prescription and description, it can be nowhere better studied than in what can be termed its *construction manuals*. These generate the undertow, the pull, the magnetic force which is the entrepreneurial self.

## After the new economy

Entrepreneurship discourse boomed in the 1990s with the rise of the new economy. However, it did not die off after the crash in 2001 and the attacks of 9/11. Instead, it changed its tone: the mood became more austere and the dreams more modest. This is especially evident in changes to the term *Ich-AG*, the German equivalent of Me Inc. Getting off the launch pad as a glittering fashion accessory, the word peaked as a political programme for combatting unemployment and finally crashed as *Unwort des Jahres* (the 'worst word of the year'), chosen by a commission of linguists to draw attention to 'factually inappropriate and inhumane phrasings in public language usage'.<sup>58</sup> The rags-to-riches dream has lost its power to convince and the post-hippy coolness of the dotcom generation has frayed. To be successful, you now don't have to be the 'client' of an employment agency. Finally, the dark side of entrepreneurial self-optimizing has also become visible: the constant fear of not having done the right thing or not enough of it, the feeling of insufficiency, is as much a part of the entrepreneurial self as mercantile skill or the courage to take risks. A popular slogan among German 'Ich-AGs' was that *Selbständige* (freelancers, literally *self-standing*) are so called because they literally work *constantly* (*ständig*). No amount of effort guarantees security but a lack of harsh self-discipline can ensure failure. The call to the entrepreneurial self also reaches people aware enough that they are economically superfluous, so much so that the promise of success sounds more like a taunt. The set of values and practices propagated in training courses for the long-term unemployed and aid measures for youth, in teaching programmes at special schools, in self-help groups and in politically engaged charities are at a basic level analogous to what executives are taught at exclusive coaching workshops, personality seminars, motivation weekends, and in self-help books on management and careers. The same values are invoked: self-responsibility, creativity, initiative, assertiveness, 'team' skills. There is the same activating rhetoric, the same imperative to optimize and the same faith in the power of faith in the self. In all these instances, the market is the final judge.

## Notes

1. Trendbüro (ed.) (2001) *Duden Wörterbuch der New Economy* (Duden Dictionary of the New Economy), Mannheim: Bibliographisches Institut, p. 79.
2. Max Weber (1949) "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy', in: *The Methodology of Social Sciences*, Glencoe, IL: Free Press, pp. 49–112, here: p. 90.
3. Hans J. Pongratz and G. Günter Voß (2003) 'From Employee to "Entreployee": Towards a "Self-Entrepreneurial" Work Force?', in: *Concepts and Transformation*, 8(3), pp. 239–254.
4. Hans J. Pongratz and G. Günter Voß (2003) 'From Employee to "Entreployee"', in particular pp. 240ff.
5. Hans J. Pongratz and G. Günter Voß (1997) 'Fremdorganisierte Selbstorganisation', in: *Zeitschrift für Personalforschung*, 7, pp. 30–53.
6. See Manfred Moldaschl and G. Günter Voß (eds) (2002) *Subjektivierung von Arbeit*, Munich/Mering: Hampp.
7. Hans J. Pongratz and G. Günter Voß (2003) *Arbeitskraftunternehmer: Erwerbsorientierungen in entgrenzten Arbeitsformen*, Berlin: Auflage (Forschung aus der Hans-Böckler-Stiftung, Bd. 47), p. 242.
8. Paul Thibaud (1985) 'The Triumph of the Entrepreneur', in: *Telos*, Nr. 64, Summer, pp. 134–140, here: p. 134. [Original: 'Le triomphe de l'entrepreneur', in: *Espit*, Dec. 1984, pp. 101–110]
9. Thibaud (1985) 'The Triumph of the Entrepreneur'.
10. Thibaud (1985) 'The Triumph of the Entrepreneur', p. 138.
11. Thibaud (1985) 'The Triumph of the Entrepreneur', p. 140.
12. Thibaud (1985) 'The Triumph of the Entrepreneur'.
13. With her infamous phrase '[t]here is no such thing as society', Prime Minister Thatcher encapsulated the point succinctly. As she elaborated, 'I think we've been through a period where too many people have been given to understand that if they have a problem, it's the government's job to cope with it. "I have a problem, I'll get a grant." "I'm homeless, the government must house me." They're casting their problem on society. And, you know, there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look to themselves first. It's our duty to look after ourselves and then, also to look after our neighbour. People have got the entitlements too much in mind, without the obligations. There's no such thing as entitlement, unless someone has first met an obligation' (Margaret Thatcher, Interview with *Women's Own Magazine*, 31.10.1987).
14. Cited in Paul Morris (1991) 'Freeing the Spirit of Enterprise: The Genesis and Development of the Concept of Enterprise Culture', in: Russell Keat and Nicholas Abercrombie (eds), *Enterprise Culture*, London: Routledge, pp. 21–37, here: p. 23. For a social science examination of enterprise culture, also see Roger Burrows (ed.) (1991) *Deciphering the Enterprising Culture*, London: Cengage; Malcolm Cross and Geoff Payne (1991) *Work and the Enterprise Culture*, London: Falmer; Paul Heelas and Paul Morris (eds) (1992)



*The Values of the Enterprise Culture: The Moral Debate*, London: Routledge; Colin Gray (1998) *Enterprise and Culture*, London: Routledge.

45. Ronald Reagan (1985) 'Why this is an Entrepreneurial Age', in: *Journal of Business Venturing*, 1, pp. 1–4, here: pp. 1, 3.

16. In more general terms, the insight that in a capitalist economy the worker acts as the free vendor of their power to work is a truism of political economy. As the German economist Lujo von Brentano explained in 1907, 'every worker who sells his labour to an employer is also an entrepreneur ... He transforms his labour power by transforming food into labour, by training special abilities, by releasing the collected tension through force of will to render it effective in the production process. He is also a producer, because he endows pre-existent material and energy with a different form, thus investing it with greater utility. He offers this to the buyer of labour power as an autonomous good and does this on his own account and at his own risk. He is the entrepreneur of labour services. The granting of his freedom, by making him responsible for himself, has made him into this entrepreneur and precisely in this capacity he demonstrates his freedom' (Lujo von Brentano (1907) *Der Unternehmer: Vortrag gehalten am 3. Januar 1907 in der Volkswirtschaftlichen Gesellschaft in Berlin*, Berlin: Simion, pp. 19, 26f.). What is new is that the worker no longer acts as an entrepreneur by selling his labour power; in addition, its buyers demand that he show entrepreneurial initiative and responsibility within the labour time he has bartered for.

17. Wolfgang Bonß, Heiner Keupp and Elmar Koenen (1984) 'Das Ende des Belastungsdiskurses? Zur subjektiven und gesellschaftlichen Bedeutung von Arbeitslosigkeit', in: Wolfgang Bonß and Rolf G. Heinze (eds) (1984) *Arbeitslosigkeit in der Arbeitsgesellschaft*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, pp. 143–188, here: pp. 182f.
18. See e.g. Martin Baethge (1991) 'Arbeit, Vergesellschaftung, Identität: Zur zunehmenden normativen Subjektivierung der Arbeit', in: *Soziale Welt*, 42, pp. 6–19; Harald Wolf (1999) *Arbeit und Autonomie: Ein Versuch über Widersprüche und Metamorphosen kapitalistischer Produktion*, Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot.
19. Stefan Kühl (2000) 'Grenzen der Vermarktlichung: Die Mythen um unternehmerisch handelnde Mitarbeiter', in: *WSI-Mitteilungen*, 53, pp. 818–828; Christoph Deutschmann (2001) 'Die Gesellschaftskritik der Industriesoziologie: ein Anachronismus', in: *Leviathan*, 29, pp. 58–69.
20. Sergio Bologna (1997/2006) *Die Zerstörung der Mittelschichten: Thesen zur neuen Selbständigkeit*, Graz/Vienna: Nausner and Nausner, p. 38. (The term 'new autonomy' (neue Selbständigkeit) used above is extracted from this title.)
21. Colin Gordon (1991) 'Governmental Rationality: An Introduction', in: Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 1–51. The anthology presented Foucault's lecture 'Governmentality' to an Anglophone public for the first time, as well as including articles mainly by former Foucault collaborators. In retrospect, it can be seen as the initiating publication for studies of governmentality.

22. On Foucault's lecture *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2010), which contains his analyses of German ordoliberalism and human capital theory (especially that of Gary S. Becker), see Chapter 3, this volume.
23. Gordon (1991) 'Governmental Rationality', p. 44.
24. Gordon (1991) 'Governmental Rationality', p. 43. See also Graham Burchell (1996) 'Liberal Government and Techniques of the Self', in: Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne and Nikolas Rose (eds), *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-liberalism and Rationalities of Government*, London: University of Chicago Press, pp. 19–36.
25. Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose (1995) 'Production, Identity, and Democracy', in: *Theory and Society*, 25, pp. 427–467, here: p. 455.
26. Paul du Gay and Graeme Salaman (1992) 'The Cult(ure) of the Customer', in: *Journal of Management Studies*, 29, pp. 615–633, here: p. 630.
27. Nikolas Rose (1998) 'Governing Enterprising Individuals' in: *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power, and Personhood*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 150–168. See also the chapter 'Enterprising Selves', in: Pat O'Malley (2004) *Risk, Uncertainty and Government*, London: Routledge-Cavendish, pp. 68ff.
28. Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman (1982) *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies*, New York: Harper; Gifford Pinchot III (1985) *Intrapreneuring: Why You Don't Have to Leave the Corporation to Become an Entrepreneur*, New York: Joanna Cotler. An overview of the cult of the entrepreneur in management literature from the 1980s is given by Patrick Wright (1987) 'Excellence', in: *London Review of Books*, 21 May, pp. 8–11. An analysis of both the managerial and the sociological discourses on enterprise is undertaken from an organization theory perspective informed by post-structuralism in Daniel Hjorth (2003) *Rewriting Entrepreneurship – for a New Perspective on Organisational Creativity*, Copenhagen: Samfundslitterature Press.
29. Peters and Waterman (1982) *In Search of Excellence*, p. 212.
30. Peters and Waterman (1982) *In Search of Excellence*, p. 202.
31. Peters and Waterman (1982) *In Search of Excellence*, p. 202.
32. Peters and Waterman (1982) *In Search of Excellence*, p. 213.
33. Pinchot (1985) *Intrapreneuring*, p. xvi.
34. Pinchot (1985) *Intrapreneuring*, p. 3.
35. Pinchot (1985) *Intrapreneuring*, pp. 196f.
36. See William H. Whyte (1956) *The Organization Man*, New York: Clarion.
37. See William Bridges (1998) *Creating You & Co.: Learn to Think Like the CEO of Your Own Career*, Cambridge, MA: Da Capo.
38. Christopher Gergen and Gregg Vanourek (2008) *Life Entrepreneurs: Ordinary People Creating Extraordinary Lives*, San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons.
39. Regarding this literature, see Heidi Marie Rimke (2000) 'Governing Citizens through Self-Help Literature', in: *Cultural Studies*, 14, pp. 61–78; Paul Lichterman (1992) 'Self-Help Reading as a Thin Culture', in: *Media, Culture and Society*, 14, pp. 421–447.
40. See Rolf Wabner (1997) *Selbstmanagement: Werden Sie zum Unternehmer Ihres Lebens*, Niedernhausen/Ts: Falken.



41. Bridges (1998) *Creating You & Co.*, p. 140.
42. Bridges (1998) *Creating You & Co.*, pp. 31ff. See also William Bridges (1994) *JobShift: How to Prosper in a Workplace Without Jobs*, New York: Da Capo.
43. Bridges (1998) *Creating You & Co.*, p. 31.
44. Christian Lutz (1995) *Leben und Arbeiten in der Zukunft (Life and Work in the Future)*, Munich: Langen/Müller, p. 57.
45. Michel Foucault (1977) *Discipline and Punish*, New York: Vintage Books, p. 164.
46. See Thomas Frank and Matt Weiland (eds) (1997) *Commodify Your Dissent: Salvos from the Baffler*, New York: W.W. Norton & Co.
47. Marie-Louise Neubeiser (1992) *Management Coaching*, Dusseldorf/Vienna: Orell Füssli, p. 161.
48. Michael Kastner (1999) *Syn-Egoismus: Nachhaltiger Erfolg durch soziale Kompetenz*, Freiburg: Herder, p. 285.
49. Richard Bandler (1985) *Using Your Brain – For a Change: Neuro-Linguistic Programming*, Moab, UT: Real People Press, p. 9.
50. Cora Besser-Siegmund and Harry Siegmund (1991) *Coach Yourself: Persönlichkeitskultur für Führungskräfte*, Düsseldorf: ECON-Verlag, pp. 73ff.
51. Besser-Siegmund and Siegmund (1991) *Coach Yourself*, p. 95.
52. Besser-Siegmund and Siegmund (1991) *Coach Yourself*, p. 130.
53. Besser-Siegmund and Siegmund (1991) *Coach Yourself*, p. 16.
54. Besser-Siegmund and Siegmund (1991) *Coach Yourself*, p. 132. Such notions of a multiple self strongly suggest comparison with the psychiatric discourse on 'multiple personalities'. The entrepreneurial self is supposed to represent an association of competing and cooperating elements, while patients with multiple personality suffer precisely from the dissociation between parts acting as independent personalities caused by extreme trauma. One of the two phenomena – the rise of the illness or the rise of the discourse on it – could be assignable to the analogy between the underlying conceptions of the subject. At any rate, the therapies for multiple personality do attempt, if not integration, then at least a liveable co-existence among the partial personalities by supporting the patients in moderating their separate voices and committing them to rules of communication. See Ian Hacking (1995) *Rewriting the Soul*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
55. Deleuze (1992) 'Postscript on the Societies of Control', p. 5.
56. Tom Peters (1992) *Liberation Management*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, p. 528.
57. Besser-Siegmund and Siegmund (1991) *Coach Yourself*, p. 144.
58. See [www.unwortdesjahres.net/](http://www.unwortdesjahres.net/).

## PART 1

# The Rationality of the Entrepreneurial Self